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THE LYRICAL BALLADS OF 1798 AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO ENGLISH POETRY

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ANALYSIS

THE LYRICAL BALLADS of 1798

and its contribution to English Poetry.

by

Helen Mildred Porter.

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THE LYRICAL BALLADS OF 1798
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Conditions of poetry leading to the publication of the Lyrical Ballads.

The Lyrical Ballads marks the culmination of the new romantic movement of the eighteenth century, of the "Renascence of Wonder" as critics have called that outburst of Romantic Poetry from Chatterton and Blake to Coleridge and Keats. An extraordinary development of imaginative appreciation and response to all the glories of natural scenery, to the beauty and worth of humble folk, of little children, and, truly to all things made by God, began to spread over all Western Europe, and particularly over Germany, England and France. Yet since the most notable outburst of this new feeling occurred in England, and there more particularly in the poetic expression, it is to the English Poetry of the period, and especially to that of the chief exponents of the movement, -- Wordsworth and Coleridge -- that the expressions "Revival of Romanticism," "Return to Nature," "Renascence of Wonder," etc., have come more particularly to refer.

On the Continent Rousseau was the chief agent in spreading the convictions from which Romantic Poetry emerged. He emphasized the worth and dignity of man as man, and the vast influence of lake and mountain over his life and happiness. Yet Rousseau understood the relations of man and the world but slightly.

It was left for the English poets with their finer insight to add true imaginative vision to the new conceptions, and to give to all thought "the light that never was on land or sea."

We see the first distinct traces of the Romantic Movement in British Literature in the contributions of Allan Ramsay, the poor Scottish wig-maker who collected many of the current Scottish songs, and wrote new ones giving us pure, tender, and genuine pictures of humble Scottish life. His genius is surely insignificant, but his influence is immortal. He published his most famous poem, The Gentle Shepherd in 1725; after that he compiled his Collection of Thirty Fables, which he published in 1730. What makes his work important is that he rejected the fantastic conceits of the earlier poets and wrote with sincerity. He used only the simplest and most natural plots, and chose for them a setting of lake and mountain scenery, such as that amid which he had actually passed his boyhood. This departure from the elaborate and conventional methods of the time is what gives his work its distinctive character.

A vague spirit of Romanticism thus started up at the very culmination of the classical period, and grew in strength and potency through the medium of minor writers until it completely overshadowed the classicism which had threatened to destroy all sincerity in poetry and even in life. Robert Ferguson's poetry was one of the more important channels by which the new feeling was carried on to the end of the century. He wrote no great poetry himself, but his Occasional Pieces, published in 1773, and chiefly concerned with the rude and humorous life of

Edinburgh, did much to kindle the muse of Burns. Thus he became, by his influence, one of the chief powers in the new poetry, since he so spread the new spirit as to direct the genius of those who could write true poetry.

It was left for four great poets at the close of the century -- Blake, Cowper, Crabbe and Burns -- to do really worthy work in the new form. They helped to establish the spirit of truth and sincerity in the minds and hearts of the English people, and to make simplicity the natural ideal and bent of the nation, although the conquest did not become complete until well on into the nineteenth century.

William Blake, the weird poet and painter, gave us in his Poetical Sketches a new study of the Elizabethan Literature and the earlier romantic poets. He set forth the glory of humble life, of home, of little children, and even of the lower animals. In his Songs of Innocence and Experience he foreshadowed the simple and natural poetry which Wordsworth perfected. By bringing into his verse much of the best in the past, especially in the work of Spenser, he enriched the new literature with a flood of energy.

William Cowper helped to prepare the way for the great Romantic Movement by his sincere expression. His translations of Homer and the shorter Greek and Latin poems linked him with the classical influence, while his poems John Gilpin, Lines to Mary Unwin, and On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture, show the return of pure native feeling and pathos to English poetry. Cow-

per along with Blake introduced the distinctly new element, the poetic relation of man to the lower animals, a theme which has been much developed by later poets. His greatest work, The Task, is mainly a description of himself, the every-day life of the country, and the quiet landscape about Olney, interspersed with disquisitions on political, social and religious subjects. Cowper loved nature entirely for her own sake. The later poets added passion and brilliancy to the verse, but Cowper certainly did much to exalt the commonplace, and to help do away with the prevailing contempt for the unadorned and the elemental.

George Crabbe, in his Village, Parish Register, and Tales of the Hall, dealt with the details of simple homes. No one has done more to widen the range of human sympathies. The poetry on humble life, thus started, long continued as an important division of English Poetry.

Robert Burns renewed the ardent treatment of love which had been absent from our poetry since before the Restoration. He gave us the true melody of the Elizabethan lyric poets who sang of love and passion. Yet, like Blake, Crabbe and Cowper, he also helped to widen human sympathies by his appreciative treatment of life among the peasantry, and by his regard for the lower animals. He showed us that we are dependent even on the tiny worms and insects for our happiness, if not for our very existence.

The spirit of liberty and equality had been growing up in Europe all through the eighteenth century. France had for a long time expressed these ideas in her literature, but it was not

until the overthrow of the Bastille in 1789 that she asserted herself and put them into action. They became moving powers in the world, and in England kindled great excitement at the time of the outbreak of the Romantic Movement. The Revolution gave new force and intensity to life in general, and to literature in particular. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey were first fired with zeal for that struggle:

> "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven! . . ."(1)

and then stirred to passionate anger against its outrages and oppressions. At least, the Revolution sufficed to awaken the life and the literature from apathy. It caused men to doubt and to feel more intensely. The indignant action against the Revolution was as powerful a stimulus to true feeling as were the generous impulses which earlier favored its movements towards justice and liberty. Wordsworth and Coleridge were both made pessimists by the unexpected reversal of affairs in France. When, however, they came to see the light, and to feel their inner harmony restored, they were able to write with all the more sincerity of purpose for their moral upheavals. It was they who gave passion and grandeur to the new poetry. Their work was the very flower

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(1) Wordsworth's The Prelude: Book XI, Lines 108,109.

of Romanticism. By their great poetic achievements, they made the expression of simple and elemental emotions popular, and set the tide indisputably towards Romanticism. After their Lyrical Ballads had become known and appreciated, all the succeeding poets were animated with the same spirit, spreading its influence throughout the nineteenth century.

Wordsworth's Poetical Temperament.

As Wordsworth grew up amidst the glories of the Lake District of England, interest in Nature and love for her were bred in him from his infancy. To him all Nature was full of presences and visions. She had one living soul, which, entering into every natural object, gave each a soul of its own. Between this spirit and the mind of man there was a harmony, which enabled Nature to communicate her own thoughts to man, and man to reflect upon them, until an absolute union between them was established. Since Nature was intimately related to God, Wordsworth studied her closely, and reverenced her in all her moods. It was through love of her that he came to honor man, as he tells us in The Prelude. Man, especially the pastoral population of his own native country, seemed to be a part of Nature herself. It was only during his excitement over the French Revolution and his interest in abstract theories, that he for a time thought of man as distinct and separate. In the main Wordsworth is pre-eminently a Poet of Nature. It is nearly always through his nature descriptions that he draws his lessons and leads us to the worship of truth and goodness. The

strongest indications of future poetic achievement in his earlier work are found in his sincerity of description. In the Evening Walk and the Descriptive Sketches we have a certain vividness and force which predict later power. Though slight traces of a youthful passion for the ornate in literature here manifest themselves, yet these early poems clearly prove the advent of a true interpreter of the new spirit.

Coleridge tells us that we have in Wordsworth's earliest poetry, "a union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying, the objects observed; and, above all, the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up all the sparkle and dewdrops. (1)

Acquaintance with Coleridge and the temperament of the two men contrasted.

In his early poetic temperament Coleridge presents a marked contrast to Wordsworth. From the first, he had a decidedly mystical spirit. He was not satisfied to brood over the ordinary aspects of Nature, but must ever meditate and dream about the strange and supernatural. He loved to pore over fairy tales even better than to loiter in the woodlands. As he grew older he began

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(1) Coleridge: Biographia Literaria: Edited by Henry Nelson Coleridge: Vol. I, Chap. 4, pp. 203,204.

to meditate on all mysteries, and that without the least mixture of wonder and incredulity. His long school life at Christ's Hospital from 1782 to 1791 powerfully fostered these characteristics. Shut out from most of Nature's living images, he speculated about Nature and delved into metaphysics.

The Sonnets of Bowles which he chanced to read in the year 1789 helped to call forth the passion for natural beauty which slumbered in him. Yet his vast and diversified intellectual interests did much to distract him from pure poetry, for they contributed matter alien and incongruous. During his early manhood he gradually subjected these partially alien domains by the shaping spirit of his imagination. Under the influence of Wordsworth's simplicity and sincerity he was able for a time to cast off, as it were, the weight of his learning and devote himself for a time to poetry pure and simple. Only after he had accomplished his great work in poetry did abstract speculation, utterly devoid of any imaginative life, gain its full hold on his mind and heart. Just the beginning of that destroying current appeared in his earlier life.

It was in the year 1795 that Wordsworth and Coleridge met for the first time. Each discerned the other's genius so clearly that he immediately felt a longing for his society as a stimulus to his own imagination. Both poets so managed their affairs that they were able for some time to live near together, to be much in each other's society, to discuss their theories and methods of poetry minutely, as well as to unite in the composition

of that one small volume, the Lyrical Ballads, which stands as an immortal memorial of their friendship.

Their Reasons for planning a volume of poetry, their ideas for the work, and their "hammering out" of theories of poetry.

In the years 1796 and 1797 Wordsworth and Coleridge were in each other's society almost constantly, and together "hammered out" their theories of poetry. In 1798 the desire to earn five pounds to pay for a journey from Nether Stowey to Lynton led the two poets to begin the composition of the Lyrical Ballads, but the cause of the volume lay deeper than the mere desire for money; it lay in the mental conformation of the two poets.

From the Advertisement prefixed to the Lyrical Ballads of 1798 and from Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, we learn what these poets had in view. In the Advertisement, we read: "They (the poems) were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." (1) The poets wished to show the world that the simplest and most elemental emotions are really worthy of consideration and have a true nobility of their own. Coleridge tells us in the Biographia Literaria: "During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbors, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry,

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(1) Wordsworth & Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads; Edited by Harold Littledale. -- Advertisement: p. i.

the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of the imagination. The sudden charm which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature. The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves.

"In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads; in which it was agreed that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.

Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analagous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

". . . In this form the Lyrical Ballads were published, and were presented by him, as an experiment, whether subjects, which from their nature rejected the usual ornaments and extra-colloquial style of poems in general might not be so managed in the language of ordinary life as to produce the pleasurable interest, which it is the peculiar business of poetry to impart."(1) Coleridge thus restates the position, which Wordsworth had somewhat confused at first by the unhappy expression in his Advertisement about the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society. Wordsworth really meant the "language of the sincere and natural-living folk" rather than the "language of the middle and lower classes of society."

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(1) Coleridge: Biographia Literaria; Vol. II; Ch. XIV; pp. 441,442.

This famous agreement was arrived at after much discussion and many differences. The genius of Coleridge awoke under the stimulus of Wordsworth's society. Yet, Coleridge refused to follow Wordsworth's ideas and even tried to influence the course taken by his friend. The impossibility of following the methods of Coleridge and the discomfort of feeling his own natural progress thwarted, were to Wordsworth a true revelation of the tendency of his own poetic genius. The two men started to compose together, but as their styles differed so much, they saw that they must do their work independently to give full scope to their differing individualities.

The working out of the design, and the poems actually accomplished -- Wordsworth, nineteen poems, Coleridge but four:"Unum sed leonem."

Wordsworth and Coleridge began The Ancient Mariner in collaboration, but, Wordsworth tells us, "Our manners proved so widely different that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog."(1) The subject of the ballad was to be derived from an account given to Coleridge by a friend, of a dream in which he had seen a phantom ship with passengers on board. Coleridge aimed to reproduce,through the medium, as it were, of his own dreams, not only the weirdness of the hallucination, but also the ideas he himself had formed either from his reading or through his own imagination of the storm and ice-pack and the dead calm at sea. It became necessary for him to discover a form of

(1) I. F. MS. Wordsworth's Poems; ed. by Wm. Knight; p. 199.

poetical expression so exquisitely subtle in its music as to make the reader's logical faculty vanish away for a time, and to increase his imaginative power many times over.

At first Wordsworth adopted the plan suggested by Coleridge, but soon he sought to explain the subject, to trace the causes and origins of the extraordinary sensations of which Coleridge wished to portray the effects alone. He suggested the idea of the murder of an innocent albatross during the passage through the southern seas as a suitable cause for the miseries of the mariner. At a later time Coleridge came to regret having agreed to this insertion. He said the tale should have no more moral to it than a dream.

Coleridge employed the simple measure of the old ballads -- the "common meter" of our hymns -- as being the form which would best remove us from reality and numb our senses to the incongruity of things. He has succeeded in making his tales of the most strange and abnormal forces affect us as do those of real substantial conditions. For example, in the stanza in the second part of the poem:

> "The breezes blew, the white foam flew,
> The furrow followed free:
> We were the first that ever burst
> Into that silent Sea."(1)

We feel the ship flying over the waters in a break-neck flight. The simplicity of the language, and the shortness of the phrases give such force and impressiveness as to keep us from even

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 12 lines 99-102.

questioning the probability of it all. Here Coleridge in contradistinction to so many authors who have written literary criticism, fully exemplifies his own principles and theories. He makes the supernatural seem truly natural. The sun and moon may be of any size or shape, but we never dream of applying an astronomical test, for Coleridge forges the handwriting of truth. In this poem, as elsewhere, we have the poet using supernatural forces to illustrate ethical principles.

The second poem of the volume is The Foster Mother's Tale, a dramatic fragment by Coleridge, taken from his unsuccessful tragedy of Osorio. It is in blank-verse and without any particular merit. Here, too, the supernatural element is introduced, but not in the realistic way of the Ancient Mariner. In the story told by the foster-mother to Maria, we read of the earth groaning and shaking to call the wicked lord to repentance for his heretical and lawless talk. Everywhere in Coleridge's poetical work, we are bound to come upon happenings arising from causes outside of the normal working of the universe.

Next comes Wordsworth's Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-tree, which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite on a Desolate Part of the Shore, yet Commanding a Beautiful Prospect. This is a short poem in blank-verse, giving much the same impression as Tintern Abbey written in the same meter. Both poems deal with nature in a decidedly spiritual way, showing how

> " . . . the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." (1)

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(1) Wordsworth's Poems: Oxford Ed. Ode on Immortality;P.590;l.206.

In the Lines, Wordsworth speaks to the traveller and tells him to rest in the yew-tree's shade and let the waves lull his mind to rest. He who piled the stones for the seat, was no mean soul, but a man of genius, who went forth into the world with a pure heart free from all vices save neglect. Gradually he came to despise all beneath him and so to revel in his own holiness that he lost all appreciation for the glory of the world and the human life about him. He died in loneliness and misery with the yew-tree seat as his only monument.

The poet exhibits the glory and suggestiveness of a simple scene, by adding his own ethical and spiritual insight to it all. He composed a part of the poem at the Hawkshead School, but it was in his more mature, though according to some critics, less artistic, rewriting of the poem for the Lyrical Ballads that he inculcated his moral. The teaching is summed up in the last lines, which are wonderfully beautiful and impressive:

"If thou be one whose heart the holy forms
Of young imagination have kept pure,
Stranger! henceforth be warned; and know that pride,
Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
Is littleness; that he, who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used;that thought with him
Is in its infancy. The man, whose eye
Is ever on himself, doth look on one,
The least of nature's works, one who might move
The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
Unlawful, ever. O, be wiser thou!
Instructed that true knowledge leads to love,
True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart."(1)

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(1) Lyrical Ballads; p. 61; lines 44-60.

The Nightingale by Coleridge in blank-verse has exquisite passages of rare music. The poet bursts out in reproach against the youths and maidens with poetical natures

> "Who lose the deep'ning twilights of the Spring
> In ball-rooms and hot theatres . . ." (1)

They know nothing of the glory of the dim stars, and of the nightingales' songs, which fill the air with enchantment. The poet tells us he has taught his own babe to be Nature's playmate and to know the evening star, the moon, and the songs of the birds.

Coleridge here introduces no supernatural elements, as is his custom, in his major poems, except, perhaps, in his description of the castle in the forest haunted by great flocks of nightingales. This passage has a fairy-tale charm reminding us of the forest descriptions in Christabel.

> ". . . . . And I know a grove
> Of large extent, hard by a castle huge
> Which the great Lord inhabits not: and so
> This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
> And the trim walks are broken up, and grass
> Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.
> But never elsewhere in one place I knew
> So many Nightingales: and far and near
> In wood and thicket over the wide grove
> They answer and provoke each other's songs --
>
> * * * *
>
> " . . . . A most gentle maid
> Who dwelleth in her hospitable home
> Hard by the Castle, and at latest eve,

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(1) Lyrical Ballads; P. 65 -- lines 36-37.

(Even like a Lady vow'd and dedicate
To something more than nature in the grove)
Glides through the pathways; she knows all
their notes,
That gentle maid! and oft, a moment's space,
What time the moon was lost behind the cloud,
Hath heard a pause of silence: till the Moon
Emerging, hath awaken'd earth and sky
With one sensation, and those wakeful Birds
Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,
As if one quick and sudden gale had swept
An hundred airy harps! . . ." (1)

An air of mysticism pervades this passage, and indeed, the whole poem, echoing in its spirit the strange fascination of the song of the nightingale. Coleridge takes as his theme a natural though glorious object in Nature, and imbues it with charm and imagination, like Wordsworth, removing us from reality, instead of drawing us towards it.

Wordsworth's The Female Vagrant is a part of the longer work Guilt and Sorrow, which the poet kept by him for many years, and considerably modified before he published it in its completed form in 1842. It is the story of a young girl who grows up in her father's cottage by Derwent's side. She loves the flowers and all the wonders of Nature,

"The Sabbath bells, and their delightful chime;
The gambols and wild freaks at shearing time;
My hen's rich nest through long grass scarce espied;
The cowslip-gathering at May's dewy prime;

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 66 lines 49-58; P. 67; lines 69-82.

The swans, that, when I sought the water-side,
From far to meet me came, spreading their snowy pride."(1)

Yet, after twenty summers all this bliss ends, for a wealthy man builds a great mansion near by, turning the lands to his own use, and subjecting the girl's father to cruel injuries when he refuses to sell his estate. Hard times follow until she marries and takes her father to live with her in her own home, where they dwell in peace for a few years. Before long, however, war breaks out, and she sails away with her husband and children to the Western World, where all those dear ones perish in one remorseless year by sword and ravenous plague. She wanders about alone in the world -- friendless and forsaken.

". . . often have I view'd,
In tears, the sun towards that country tend
Where my poor heart lost all its fortitude;
And now across this moor my steps I bend --
Oh! tell me whither -- for no earthly friend
Have I. -- She ceased, and weeping turned away,
As if because her tale was at an end
She wept; -- because she had no more to say
Of that perpetual weight which on her spirit lay."(2)

Wordsworth here gives imaginative light and glow to the most ordinary sorrows. With him "common" is not "the commonplace." He makes home-life, gardens, and cottages things of the most vital interest and moment.

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(1) Lyrical Ballad: P. 70; l. 22-27.
(2) " " P. 84; l. 262-270.

The next poem is Goody Blake and Harry Gill, a true story by Wordsworth. The poet took the tale from Erasmus Darwin's Zoonomia, where we read of a young Warwickshire farmer seizing upon an old woman as she is carrying away sticks from his hedge during a severe winter night. She utters a curse on him, exclaiming: "O may he never more be warm!"(1) He complains of cold all the next day, and being possessed of the one insane idea that nothing can make him warm, he keeps his bed until his death twenty years later. Wordsworth changes the story very little, for the ethical element in it exactly suits his taste. He writes his version in iambic tetrameter lines, arranged in alternate rhymes, which give rapidity to the movement, and accord well with the simplicity and bareness of the narrative.

Lines written at a Small Distance from my House and Sent by my Little Boy to the Person to whom they are Addressed, also by Wordsworth, was composed in front of his Alfoxden House on the first day of March and sent to his sister by the little son of Basil Montague. In it he begs her to come out to the woods with him to enjoy the birth of spring and new hope.

"Love, now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 91; l. 101.

From earth to man, from man to earth
-- It is the hour of feeling.

One moment now may give us more
Than fifty years of reason
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

Some silent laws our hearts will make,
Which they shall long obey,
We for the year to come may take
Our temper from to-day." (1)

Wordsworth uses four-lined stanzas of iambic tetrameter in the slower and heavier parts, iambic-tetrameter and trimeter in the quicker and more animated portions. We see the poet in a reflective, but, withal, cheerful mood, as he broods over the happiness which Nature can give us as it quiets our minds and fills our hearts with a new hope.

Wordsworth's Simon Lee, the old Huntsman with an Incident in which he was Concerned, is printed next. It tells of an old huntsman who lives alone with his wife in the direst poverty. They try to till their ground, but have not strength to do much. One day when the old man is hammering in vain at the root of a tree, a young fellow comes up and taking the tool out of his hand, chops the tree down with a single blow. The old man is unspeakably grateful.

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 96; l. 21-32.

"The tears into his eyes were brought,
And thanks and praises seemed to run
So fast out of his heart, I thought
They never would have done."(1)

The poet apologizes for the lack of plot in the poem, but adds:

"Oh reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
Oh gentle reader! you would find
A tale in everything."(2)

The moral reflection is summed up in the last four lines:

"--I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning.
Alas! the gratitude of men
Has oft'ner left me mourning."(3)

In no poem more than this does Wordsworth try to interest humanity in the simple fundamental feelings of mankind. He stands forth here as the advocate for the lowly, and humble and helpless, revealing his own tender and sympathetic soul.

Wordsworth's Anecdote for Fathers Shewing how the Art of Lying may be Taught follows. The poet tells how the little boy, the son of Basil Montague, who was under his care for two or

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 904; l. 97-100.
(2) " " P. 102; l. 73-76.
(3) " " P. 104; l.101-104.

three years, was out walking with him one day at Liswyn Farm. He asks the child where he prefers to be, by Kilve's delightful shore, or there at Liswyn Farm. The boy answers:

> ". . . 'At Kilve I'd rather be
> Than here at Liswyn Farm.'" (1)

And when he is repeatedly questioned why? he says:

> " . . . 'At Kilve there was no weather cock,
> And that's the reason why.'" (2)

The boy really had no definite reasons, so the poet points the moral of the incident, with perfect candour, against himself. In this way, as the original title of the poem indicates, the art of lying may be taught.

Hasty reasoning and even coherent and fluent speech are often the essence of lying. The boy had clear enough perceptions and tastes of his own, but when he was compelled to argue the case, he became insincere.

This is a poem of reflection on the small and insignificant things. In the closing passage he tells us of the manner in which the incident impressed him:

> "Oh, dearest, dearest boy! my heart
> For better lore would seldom yearn

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 107; l. 35-36.
(2) " " P. 108; l. 55-56.

Could I but teach the hundredth part
Of what from thee I learn."(1)

He already feels that

"The child is father of the man,"(2)

and here foreshadows the thoughts on little children expressed in the Ode on Immortality.

"Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind
That, deaf and silent read'st the eternal deep
Haunted forever by the eternal mind --
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave,
Thou, o'er whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a master o'er his Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?" (3)

The next poem is We are Seven by Wordsworth written in alternate iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines, which also rhyme alternately. It is the story of a little girl who persists in saying there are seven children in her family, although two of that number are dead. Wordsworth composed the poem while walking in the grove of Alfoxden in the spring of 1798, but it

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 109;lines 57-60.
(2) Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by John Morley. P. 357.
(3) " " " " " " P. 359.

was in 1793, in the area of Goodrich Castle that he heard the child tell the story. He says he began the poem with the last line, and composed the whole of the last stanza before he set to work on the rest. The closing words really contain the gist of all that precedes:

> "'But they are dead; those two are dead!
> Their spirits are in heaven!'
> 'Twas throwing words away: for still
> The little maid would have her will
> And said, 'Nay, we are seven!'"(1)

When the poem was all but finished, Wordsworth recited it to Coleridge and to his sister, and said that a prefatory stanza must be added. After a few minutes Coleridge had the opening lines prepared:

> "A simple child, dear brother Jim,
> That lightly draws its breath,
> And feels its life in every limb,
> What should it know of death?"(2)

Wordsworth objected to the rhyme "dear brother Jim" as ludicrous, but all three enjoyed the joke of hitching in their friend James Tobin's name, who was familiarly called "Jim." This fellow Jim begged Wordsworth to cut out the poem <u>We are Seven</u> as he said it would make him "everlastingly ridiculous." The poet did take

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(1) <u>Lyrical Ballads</u>: P. 114; lines 65-69.
(2) " " P. 110; " 1-4.

out "dear brother Jim" leaving the line two feet short and without a corresponding rhyme, but he retained the poem in the volume, and wisely so, for it became one of the most popular of all.

It is the matter-of-fact simplicity of the little cottage girl, and her refusal to share in his wonder at the mysteries of life and death that seem to Wordsworth a marvellous thing. In vain he puts the question:

> "You run about, my little Maid,
> Your limbs they are alive;
> If two are in the church-yard laid
> Then ye are only five." (1)

The meditations of the poet on this incident, which occurred at least five years before the publishing of the poem, are illustrative of Wordsworth's definition of true poetry: "Poetry is the expression of emotion recollected in tranquillity"--for it is only after he has brooded over the scene in a quiet and peaceful mood, that he writes it down. Here he endows a simple conversation, which would have been forgotten by most persons, with all the wonders of imaginative and spiritual intuition.

Lines written in Early Spring is one of Wordsworth's most charming poems. It tells of the glories of springtime, of the forests and the notes of the birds, and gives us the sense

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 112; lines 33-36.

of perfect rest and peace.

Of the circumstances of the composition Wordsworth says, "Actually composed while I was sitting by the side of the brook that runs down from the Comb, in which stands the village of Alford, through the grounds of Alfoxden. It was a chosen resort of mine. The brook ran down a sloping rock so as to make a waterfall considerable for that country, and across the pool below had fallen a tree, an ash if I rightly remember, from which rose perpendicularly, boughs in search of the light intercepted by the deep shade above. The boughs bore leaves of green, that for want of sunshine had faded into almost lily-white, and from the underside of this natural sylvan bridge depended long and beautiful tresses of ivy, which waved gently in the breeze, that might,poetically speaking, be called the breath of the waterfall. This motion varied of course in proportion to the power of water in the brook. When, with dear friends, I revisited this spot, after an interval of more than forty years, this interesting feature of the scene was gone. To the owner of the place I could not but regret that the beauty of this retired part of the grounds had not tempted him to make it more accessible by a path, not broad or obtrusive, but sufficient for persons who love such scenes to creep along without difficulty."(1)

This poem reminds us of the simple beauty of Colin Clout, or of Wordsworth's own poem The Solitary Reaper.

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(1) Notes from I. F. Manuscript: prefixed to Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by William Knight; P. 232.

"Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

* * * * *

"A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides."(1)

No stanza in Wordsworth is more charming than the opening one in the Lines:

"I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in the grove I sat reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind."(2)

To the glory and cheerfulness of Nature, the poet compares man, a gloomy creature set in among such loveliness. Nature has always made the most of herself, but man has thrown away his opportunities of attaining the highest and has made sad havoc of himself.

"To her fair works did nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

* * *

"The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;

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(1) Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by John Morley; p. 192.
(2) Lyrical Ballads: P. 115; lines 1-4.

And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

"If I these thoughts may not prevent,
If such be of my creed the plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?"(1)

These charming stanzas are striking examples of the imaginative light which Wordsworth gives to natural objects. The emotion aroused by the delightful scene and the reflections brought forth show us the depth of the poet's feelings on the most common phases of Nature.

Of the first ideas on the composition of The Thorn Wordsworth tells us, "It arose out of my observing on the ridge of Quantock Hill on a stormy day, a thorn which I had often passed in calm and bright weather without noticing it. I said to myself 'Cannot I by some invention, do as much to make this thorn permanently an impressive object as the storm has made it at this moment to my eyes?'"(2) He describes the thorn thus:

"There is a thorn; it looks so old,
In truth you'd find it hard to say
How it could ever have been young,
It looks so old and grey.
Not higher than a two-years child,
It stands erect this aged thorn
It is a mass of knotted joints,
No leaves it has, no thorny points;

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 114; lines 5-9 and 17-24.
(2) Notes from I. F. Manuscript: prefixed to Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by William Knight; P. 207.

A wretched thing forlorn,
It stands erect, and like a stone
With lichens it is overgrown.

II.

"Like rock or stone, it is o'er grown
With lichens to the very top
And hung with heavy tufts of moss,
A melancholy crop:
Up from the earth these mosses creep
And this poor thorn they clasp it round,
So close, you'd say that they were bent
With plain and manifest intent,
To drag it to the ground:
And all had joined in one endeavor
To bury this poor thorn forever.

III.

"High on a mountain's highest ridge,
Where oft the stormy winter gale
Cuts like a scythe, while through the clouds
It sweeps from vale to vale;
Not five yards from the mountain path
This thorn you on your left espy;
And to the left, three yards beyond,
You see a little muddy pond
Of water, never dry;
I have measured it from side to side;
'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide."(1)

About this scene Wordsworth weaves, purely from his own imagination, a tale of a deserted woman who comes up to weep by the thorn. Some believe she has thrown her babe which she may have murdered, into the little pond. Others believe she has buried it beneath a pile of moss nearby.

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 117 lines 1-33.

"And close beside this aged thorn
There is a fresh and lovely sight
A beauteous heap, a hill of moss,
Just half a foot in height.

* * *

"For oft there sits, between the heap
That's like an infant's grave in size,
And that same pond of which I spoke
A woman in a scarlet cloak,
And to herself she cries
'Oh misery! oh misery!
Oh woe is me! oh misery!'"(1)

Of this poem critics have said that it is grander in poetic conception than in poetic result, and the same thing has been said of some of the other poems in the Lyrical Ballads, as Peter Bell and The Idiot Boy, where normal prose order and style are employed. We find here a rather unimaginative treatment as compared with Tennyson's treatment of the same theme, as, for example, in either of his Marianas, as:

"With blackest moss the flower plots
Were thickly crusted, one and all;
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable-wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.
She only said, 'My life is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said:
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'" (2)

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 119; lines 34-38 and 60-66.
(2) Tennyson's Poems: Cambridge Ed. Mariana: P. 8; lines 1-12.

Or,

"With one black shadow at its feet,
The house thro' all the level shines
Close-latticed to the brooding heat,
And silent in its dusty vines;
A faint blue ridge upon the right,
An empty river-bed before,
And shallows on a distant shore,
In glaring sands and inlets bright.
But 'Ave Mary' made she moan,
And 'Ave Mary,' night and morn,
And, 'Ah,' she sang, 'to be all alone,
To live forgotten and love forlorn.'"(1)

Next comes Wordsworth's poem The Last of the Flock written in rhyming couplets of iambic tetrameter. It tells of a strong man carrying a lamb in his arms along a public highway and weeping bitterly. Some one asks him why he is so sad, and he tells them that he and his family have been so afflicted with poverty that he has had to dispose of a vast flock of sheep one by one to keep his children from starvation. He has but one sheep left, his most precious ewe, from whom he raised fifty comely sheep. Now he must sell her, too, though she is "the last of all his flock."

"They dwindled Sir, sad sight to see!
From ten to five, from five to three
A lamb, a weather,* and a ewe;
And then at last from three to two;
And of my fifty, yesterday

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(1) Tennyson's Poems: Mariana in the South: P. 29; lines 1-12.
* Sic. 1st Ed.

I had but only one
And here it lies upon my arm,
Alas, and I have none;
To-day I fetched it from the rock;
It is the last of all my flock."(1)

The poet's heart is close to the great heart of humanity; his imagination is warmed by a deep pathos and genuine passion, and he reveals himself to be the true poet of man.

The Dungeon, a fragment from Coleridge's Osorio, is a short poem in blank-verse. The poet cries out against the cruelty of the prisons, which close up every natural outlet for human feeling and breed poison in the hearts of men.

"Each pore and natural outlet shrivell'd up
By ignorance and parching poverty,
His energies roll back upon his heart,
And stagnate and corrupt; till changed to poison,
They break out on him, like a loathsome plague-spot;
Then we call in our pamper'd mountebanks --
And this is our best cure!"(2)

The Mad Mother by Wordsworth is a very sad case reported to the poet by a lady of Bristol. It tells of a mother babbling away to her babe in an insane manner. She says she was violently mad before her child was born, but he need not fear her, for he is her only joy and delight. She will take him away to the woods, where they will live together in endless bliss.

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 138; lines 91-100.
(2) " " P. 130; " 6-12.

"Sweet babe! they say that I am mad,
But nay, my heart is far too glad;
And I am happy when I sing
Full many a sad and doleful thing:
Then, lovely baby, do not fear!
I pray thee have no fear of me;
But, safe as in a cradle, here
My lovely baby! thou shalt be:
To thee I know too much I owe;
I cannot work thee any woe.

* * * * *

"Dread not their taunts, my little life,
I am thy father's wedded wife;
And underneath the spreading tree
We two will live in honesty.
If his sweet boy he could forsake,
With me he never would have stayed:
From him no harm my babe can take;
But he, poor man! is wretched made;
And every day we two will pray
For him that's gone and far away.

* * * * *

"Then, pretty dear, be not afraid:
We'll find thy father in the wood.
Now laugh and be gay, to the woods away!
And there, my babe, we'll live for aye."(1)

This poem is in iambic tetrameter rhymed in couplets, and has the swift movement of the incoherent, rambling talk of an insane person. It shows forth the poet's sympathy and appreciation for the feelings of others, even for a mad mother whose sentiments others might pass by as having no affinity with those of humanity

(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 142; lines 11-20; 71-80; 96-100.

in general. Here he decidedly emphasizes his idea of dealing with the humblest people and showing them to be worthy of noble treatment in poetry.

The Idiot Boy by Wordsworth tells of a fond mother, Betty Foy, putting her idiot-boy on horseback at night, and sending him out by moonlight to bring the doctor to Susan Gale, a sick neighbor whom she is nursing. The boy rides forth in glee, muttering sounds of joy as he gazes on the moon and the stars. He does not return by midnight, so she goes out after him, fearing he may have fallen to chasing the shadows in the rivers. She searches for a long time in vain, but Johnny is near by sitting on his horse, while he allows it to feed freely. He comes out from among the trees and she soon sees him in full view. She embraces him and cries,

> " . . .'Tell us Johnny, do,
> Where all this long night you have been,
> What you have heard, what you have seen,
> And Johnny, mind you tell us true.'
>
> "Now Johnny all night long had heard
> The owls in tuneful concert strive;
> No doubt too he the moon had seen;
> For in the moonlight he had been
> From eight o'clock till five.
>
> "And thus to Betty's Question, he
> Made answer like a traveller bold,
> (His very words I give to you,)
> 'The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
> And the sun did shine so cold.'
> -- Thus answered Johnny in his glory,
> And that was all his travel's story."(1)

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 179; lines 448-463.

This poem is an example of the way in which Wordsworth went to an extreme to enforce his views of a principle. Maternal love, being one of the greatest glories of the human race, is most wonderful when manifested toward the least human object -- the idiot child. The poet says himself, "I have often applied to idiots in my own mind that sublime expression of Scripture, that 'their life is hidden with God.'"(1) He attached passion to the very name "Idiot;" he found the pure elements of the poetic temper in the outburst of pleasure which kept the boy wandering in the moonlight and listening to the voices of Nature. The Idiot Boy is an incomparable artistic feat. That with such ordinary material the poet should be able to enlist the reader's full interest and sympathy, proves how the rich personality of the poet is the all in all in true poetry. Wordsworth had that passion of fellow-feeling that causes the heart to beat in sympathy with human sorrow as well as with human joy. His material here was so simple that it required great and original powers to mould it into permanent poetic worth.

Lines written near Richmond, upon the Thames, at Evening is a very short poem by Wordsworth. It was later, at the recommendation of Coleridge, broken up into two pieces entitled Written while Sailing in a Boat at Evening, and Remembrance of Collins. The poet says of the work, "It was during a solitary walk on the banks of the Cam that I was first struck with this appearance, and applied it to my ownfeelings in the manner here expressed, chang-

(1) Letter from Wordsworth to Professor Wilson -- Wordsworth by Walter Raleigh; p. 95.

ing the scene to the Thames near Windsor."(1) The poem is in iambic tetrameter lines, rhyming alternately, which give it a swift, flowing movement, as illustrated in the stanza:

"Glide gently, thus forever glide,
Oh Thames! that other bards may see,
As lovely visions by thy side
As now, fair river! come to me.
Oh glide, fair stream! forever so;
Thy quiet soul on all bestowing,
'Till all our minds for ever flow,
As thy deep waters now are flowing."(2)

Expostulation and Reply by Wordsworth is the next poem. In a prefatory note Wordsworth says, "This poem is a favorite among the Quakers, as I have learned on many occasions." It was composed in front of the house of Alfoxden, in the spring of 1798." (3) The poet represents a friend as remonstrating with him for dreaming away his time. He urges him to take to his books instead, and gain "that light bequeath'd to beings else forlorn and blind,"(4) and "the spirit breath'd from dead men to their kind."(5) To this the poet makes a reply in which he brings out again his belief in Nature as a source of inspiration and knowledge, for he says,

"That we can feed this mind of ours,
In a wise passiveness." (6)

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(1) Notes from I. F. Manuscript: prefixed to Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by William Knight, P. 28.
(2) Lyrical Ballads: P. 181;lines 17-24.
(3) Notes from I. F. Manuscript: prefixed to Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by William Knight, P. 237.
(4) Lyrical Ballads: P. 183; lines 5 & 6.
(5) " " " " " 7 & 8.
(6) " " " 184; " 23 & 24.

Man must not always be really seeking truth. There is a time for quiet meditation, and for communion with the Spirit of the Universe. The mind must be passive as well as active. It must be open to the subtle influences and powers with which it is in relation.

> "Think you, mid all this mighty sum
> Of things for ever speaking,
> That nothing of itself will come,
> But we must still be seeking?
>
> -- Then ask not wherefore, here, alone,
> Conversing as I may,
> I sit upon this old grey stone,
> And dream my time away."(1)

The feelings which Wordsworth describes here are really the poetic feelings. "Poetry to Wordsworth," as Walter Raleigh tells us, "meant that mood of wonder and acceptance and delight, whereby the intellectual questionings of the mind are, if not finally set at rest, reduced to their just dimensions, and seen, as a mode of human activity, in a larger perspective. The world, which the intellect had vainly attempted to subdue to a system, is resolved, in a moment, by this new method of consideration, to harmony and peace." (2)

In similar vein is Wordsworth's The Tables Turned. Here the poet brings out still more explicitly Nature's relation as a teacher of man. Books are a dull and endless strife. Nature is

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 185; lines 25-32.
(2) Wordsworth: by Walter Raleigh; p. 61.

full of inspiration and harmony. Yet, Wordsworth's propositions cannot be taken as more than a half playful criticism of some too bookish friend. In two of the closing stanzas, he gives some of his most strongly emphasized ideas of Nature.

> "One impulse from the vernal wood
> May teach you more of man;
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.
>
> "Sweet is the lore which nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;
> -- We murder to dissect." (1)

It does not mean that the poet is really hostile to scientific investigation. What he desires is that men should not lose the soul of Nature in their mental attitude toward her. For Wordsworth, she is full of inspiration and meaning and imparts glorious lessons of wisdom.

Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquillity and Decay; A Sketch, following next, is a short poem in blank verse. Wordsworth says of it, "If I recollect right, these verses are an overflow from the Old Cumberland Beggar."(2) In speaking of his purpose in composing the Lyrical Ballads, he says of this poem along with several others, "It has also been part of my general purpose

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: 187; lines 21-28.
(2) Notes from I. F. Manuscript: prefixed to Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by William Knight; P. 279.

to attempt to sketch characters under the influence of less impassioned feelings, as in The Two April Mornings, The Fountain, The Old Man Travelling, The Two Thieves, etc., characters of which the elements are simple, belonging rather to nature than to manners, such as exist now, and will probably always exist, and from which their constitution may be distinctly and profitably contemplated."(1)

In The Old Man Travelling we read of an old man moving along with a quiet and peaceful gait, and apparently lost in thought. He is going to take "a last leave" of his son who has been brought to Falmouth from a sea-fight, "and there is dying in a hospital." Throughout we feel the calm of one who has given up the struggle against Nature and fate, and is now resigned to whatever Heaven may send.

> " ------- He is insensibly subdued
> To settled quiet: he is one by whom
> All effort seems forgotten, one to whom
> Long patience has such mild composure given,
> That patience now doth seem a thing, of which
> He hath no need. He is by nature led
> To peace so perfect, that the young behold,
> With envy, what the old man hardly feels."(2)

Next comes Wordsworth's The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman. The poet prefixes an explanation to this poem, saying, "When a Northern Indian, from sickness, is unable to

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(1) Sneath: Wordsworth, Poet of Nature and Poet of Man; P. 93.
(2) Lyrical Ballads: P. 189; lines 7-14.

continue his journey with his companions, he is left behind, covered over with Deer-skins, and is supplied with water, food, and fuel if the situation of the place will afford it. He is informed of the track which his companions intend to pursue, and if he is unable to follow, or overtake them, he perishes alone in the Desart; unless he should have the good fortune to fall in with some other tribes of Indians. It is unnecessary to add that the females are equally, or still more, exposed to the same fate. See that very interesting work Hearne's Journey from Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean. When the Northern Lights, as the same writer informs us, vary their position in the air, they make a rustling and a crackling noise. This circumstance is alluded to in the following poem."(1)

Wordsworth's poem tells of a sick Indian woman, left behind by her tribe. She bewails the loss of her babe, and cleaves in her solitude to life and society, crying out against those who have abandoned her to desolation and death.

"Alas! you might have dragged me on
Another day, a single one!
Too soon despair o'er me prevailed;
Too soon my heartless spirit failed;
When you were gone my limbs were stronger,
And Oh how grievously I rue,
That, afterwards, a little longer,
My friends, I did not follow you!
For strong and without pain I lay,
My friends, when you were gone away.

* * * *

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(1) Notes from I. F. Manuscript: prefixed to Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by William Knight, P. 240.

"My journey will be shortly run,
I shall not see another sun,
I cannot lift my limbs to know
If they have any life or no.
My poor forsaken child! if I
For once could have thee close to me,
With happy heart I then would die,
And my last thoughts would happy be.
I feel my body die away,
I shall not see another day."(1)

Here we can feel the bitter anguish of unsatisfied desire and longing.

"My child! they gave thee to another,
A woman who was not thy mother.
When from my arms my babe they took,
On me how strangely did it look!
Through his whole body something ran,
A most strange something did I see;
-- As if he strove to be a man,
That he might pull the sledge for me.
And then he stretched his arms, how wild!
Oh mercy! like a little child."(2)

The Convict is an immature work by Coleridge. The poet describes the glory of a wonderful sunset:

"The glory of evening was spread through the west;
-- On the slope of a mountain I stood,
While the joy that precedes the calm season of rest
Rang loud through the meadow and wood."(3)

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 194; lines 21-30; 61-70.
(2) " " P. 195; " 31-40.
(3) " " P. 197; " 1-4.

Then he tells us that we must turn from this beautiful calm to view the misery of the lonely convict pining away in his solitary cell. He bewails the sad conditions of the prisons, and longs to place the convict in another land where he may begin his life anew.

Here Coleridge writes in his usual weird manner, though he employs no supernatural elements, as is his custom in his major poems. He rather gives us a creepy sense of the terror of it all, as in the stanzas:

"His bones are consumed, and his life-blood is dried,
With wishes the past to undo;
And his crime, through the pains that o'erwhelm him, descried,
Still blackens and grows on his view.

"When from the dark synod, or blood-reeking field,
To his chamber the monarch is led,
All soothers of sense their soft virtue shall yield,
And quietness pillow his head.

"But if grief, self-consumed, in oblivion should doze,
And conscience her tortures appease,
'Mid tumult and uproar this man must repose;
In the comfortless vault of disease."(1)

The poet sums up his reflection in the words of a visitor to the prisoner:

"'At thy name though compassion her nature resign,
Though in virtue's proud mouth thy report be a stain,
My care if the arm of the mighty were mine,
Would plant thee where yet thou might'st blossom again.'"(2)

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 198; lines 21-32.
(2) " " " 200; " 48-52.

The last poem in the Lyrical Ballads is Wordsworth's Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798. It is a marvellous spiritual autobiography, summing up all that is essential in The Prelude. Wordsworth himself says of it, "No poem of mine is composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days, with my Sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol. It was published almost immediately after in the little volume of which so much has been said in these notes. -- (The Lyrical Ballads, at first published at Bristol by Cottle.)"(1) "The Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey," says Myers, "have become, as it were, the 'locus classicus' or consecrated formulary of the Wordsworthian faith."(2)

Wordsworth dedicates the poem to his sister, expressing his wish, which we know to have been so futile, that the memories of these glorious scenes would feed and calm her soul in the years to come.

" -------- and in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured

(1) Notes from the I. F. Manuscript; prefixed to Wordsworth's Poems: Ed. by William Knight; P. 265.
(2) Myers; Wordsworth: P. 33.

Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
They memory be as a dwelling-place,
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; Oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Shall be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! . . ."(1)

Here the poet tells us of the various stages in his feeling toward Nature. At first he took a merely animal delight in the glories of the world:

" . . . . . when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led; more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved."(2)

Later he comes to have a deep love for Nature, and a longing to be constantly in her companionship:

" ----------The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. . . . . ." (3)

And finally, he comes to embue Nature with spiritual attributes, not, indeed, worshipping her as a goddess, but seeing

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 209; lines 138-147.
(2) " " " 205; " 68-73.
(3) " " " 206; " 76-84.

in her the expression of the soul of the Infinite. He tells of this in the hauntingly beautiful lines:

> " ----------For I have learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth; of all the mighty world
> Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
> In nature and the language of the sense,
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being." (1)

In this closing poem we have some of the most exquisite, as well as some of the most intense passages in Wordsworth's poetry, as:

> "How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
> Oh sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,
> How often has my spirit turned to thee!" (2)

And again after speaking of the impulse Nature has

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 206; lines 89-112.
(2) " " " 204; " 56-58.

given him towards philanthropy:

> " - - - - - - - - -Nor less, I trust,
> To them I may have owed another gift,
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world
> Is lighten'd: -- that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. . . ."(1)

Tintern Abbey is a fitting close to the Lyrical Ballads, not only as summarizing Wordsworth's philosophy, but as giving us some of his choicest music, predicting the later outblossoming which should establish him as one of the giants of all ages in poetic achievement.

Publication of the work and its reception. Conclusion.

The volume closed with Tintern Abbey, and nothing remained but to find a printer brave enough to publish the work of such inconspicuous authors. Coleridge happened to be friendly with a learned young printer named Joseph Cottle, who was in business in Bristol. Cottle had taken an interest in the Pantisocrats and had aided them in their united schemes, as well as Coleridge in his own individual plans. It was natural that the young poets should turn to him as the one most apt to favor them. In May, 1798,

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: P. 203; lines 36-49.

Coleridge invited him to Alfoxden for a week, during which time they made preparations for the publication of the Lyrical Ballads. The price of the copyright was fixed at thirty guineas, payable in the last fortnight of July, the money being necessary for their proposed German tour. They were no longer content with the small sum they had set out to raise -- the price of the journey from Nether Stowey to Lynton. The Wordsworths superintended the publishing of the volume, actually taking up lodgings at Bristol while the printing was going on. We have no details about the work, but we know it was completed to their satisfaction, and the money paid at the appointed time

Edward Dowden in his preface to a reprint of the volume says: "The sale was so slow that Cottle parted with the larger number of the five hundred copies printed, to Arch, a London bookseller. The copyright was purchased in a lot with other copyrights by Longman, but as it was considered of no value, Cottle begged that it might be restored to him. His request was granted, whereupon Cottle presented the copyright to Wordsworth."(1)

The reception given to the Lyrical Ballads was not at all enthusiastic, but the little volume attracted some attention among the most learned men even in the earlier years of its existence. In 1800 appeared a second edition, and other editions followed in 1802 and 1805. Yet it was some of the least worthy

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: Ed. by Edward Dowden; P. vi.

of the poems that attracted the most attention, the poet Southey being alone in recognizing the worth of Tintern Abbey, or Lines Left on a Yew-tree Seat. The influence of romanticism had been very slow in reaching the masses of the educated, so the new volume had to win the heart of a comparatively unsympathetic public. Hardly a reader of any distinction saw the worth of Lines Written at a Small Distance from my House, or Lines Written in Early Spring. This seems strange to us who have worked many of the verses into our every day thought and speech. The stanzas from the first poem,

> "One moment now may give us more
> Than fifty years of reason;
> Our minds shall drink at every pore
> The spirit of the season.
>
> "Some silent laws our hearts may make,
> Which they shall long obey;
> We for the year to come may take
> Our temper from to-day."(1)

and the stanza from the second poem:

> "I heard a thousand blended notes,
> While in a grove I sate reclined,
> In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
> Bring sad thoughts to the mind." (2)

have become as familiar as any lines in English poetry, and the

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(1) Lyrical Ballads: Ed. by Edward Dowden; p. 97; lines 25-32.
(2) " " P. 115; lines 1-4.

best critics have given them a lofty place. If the little volume had appeared under the poetic tendencies of 1825 rather than 1798,a proper value would undoubtedly have been set on these achievements, but as it was, as the publishers told Coleridge, the greater part of the first edition was sold to seafaring men who, having heard of the Ancient Mariner, took the volume to sea with them for a song-book. Literary men felt that the Ancient Mariner was an anomoly in composition, and a freak in poetry.

Yet the Lyrical Ballads gradually came to its own, as is seen by the influence it exerted on the poetical expression and thought of the nineteenth century. It is the beginning of the new Romanticism. Poetry of Nature and Love had flourished in obscure channels during a part of the eighteenth century, but only in a rough and immature form. It required something more brilliantly poetic to make a permanent impress on the great expressers, who followed in such rapid succession in the opening years of the nineteenth century. Wordsworth and Coleridge supplied this new inspiration which was to set the trend of poetry for more than a hundred years to come.

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